

Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

Indiana

Education Helps Indiana Maintain Water Fluoridation in Communities

“Despite the fact that thousands of studies, analyses, and experiments have shown fluoridation to be safe and effective, some insist that it cease until all doubts about its safety have been resolved. Of course, it is impossible to prove the absolute safety of anything. But in the case of fluoridation, opponents are constantly making new allegations, none of which are supported by science.”

James R. Powers, Manager, Indiana Water Fluoridation Program
Indiana State Department of Health

Public Health Problem (Issue)

Over the last few years, water fluoridation has been under fire due to increased ill-informed anti-fluoridation activity and the tightening of community budgets.

[Preventing](#) communities from discontinuing water fluoridation by educating city officials, water treatment plant personnel, and the public on the benefits and cost effectiveness of community water fluoridation [is an on-going priority](#).

In Indiana, 95% of the population served by public water supplies, have access to fluoridated water. That exceeds both the national average of 75% and the Healthy People 2020 objective.

In the towns of Attica and Liberty, repair and replacement costs of water fluoridation and related equipment caused town officials to question whether water fluoridation was worthwhile.

In Plymouth, Princeton and Columbus, anti-fluoridation activity raised doubts about each town's long standing water fluoridation programs.

A local group in Plymouth appeared before the city council and requested that fluoridation be stopped. They cited anti-fluoridation information gleaned from the internet.

The situation in Princeton was different in that a newly hired water superintendent expressed his strong doubts about the safety of water fluoridation after reviewing information on anti-fluoridation websites. He was prepared to discontinue the city water fluoridation program which had been in place since 1957.

Columbus presented a unique challenge. A local anti-fluoride dentist organized a meeting to try and build public support for the removal of the fluoridation system at the city water treatment plant. He also presented information to the staff at the water facility who initially brought the situation to the attention of ISDH. Being informed early by the water plant staff allowed us to inform the IDA that was able to get other community dentists onboard to support fluoridation in Columbus.

Taking Action (Intervention)

In each instance, ISDH fluoridation staff discussed, in depth, the benefits of water fluoridation citing studies from legitimate sources. Information packets, tailored to each situation, were prepared, distributed and explained to the water plant staff, city officials, local dentists, local health departments, and interested citizens.

In Plymouth and Attica, presentations were given and questions answered at town council meetings.

Additional support was obtained from local dentists and health departments.

Meetings with water plant personnel were conducted in Liberty and Columbus to emphasize the positive contribution they make to the overall public health by providing fluoridated water. Information packets were distributed and questions about water fluoridation were answered.

Impact

The dental benefits provided by water fluoridation have been an important part of the public health of Indiana communities for the last 66 years.

According the ISDH DMFT Surveys, the incidence of dental decay in Indiana's school age children has

been reduced by 70% since 1958 largely due to water fluoridation.

The education provided by ISDH helped prevent the water fluoridation systems in Attica, Liberty, Plymouth and Princeton from being turned off, thus protecting the dental health of the 28,000 Hoosiers served by these public water systems. This has even wider implications since often, in Indiana, the discontinuation of water fluoridation in one community can lead to the same thing occurring in neighboring communities.

The distribution of information packets and meetings with water plant personnel in Columbus directly undermined the local anti-fluoridation dentist's attempts to build local support. It also helped reinforce the support for fluoridation by the water plant personnel who help make it possible. Hearing anti-fluoridation rhetoric from a dentist had made some question whether feeding fluoride was safe for the community.

Footnotes

ISDH DMFT Surveys. CDC website: Community Water Fluoridation

Success Story Author Contact:

James R. Powers, Manager
Indiana Water Fluoridation Program
jpowers@isdh.in.gov
[317-503-1816](tel:317-503-1816)

Block Grant Coordinator Information:

Indiana State Department of Health

Katherine Hokanson, PHHS Block Grant Coordinator
2 N. Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Phone: 317-234-2865
E-mail: khokanson@isdh.in.gov
Web site: www.in.gov/isdh

Healthy People Objective
Community Water Fluoridation

PHHS Block Grant Funding
100% - Total source of funding

PHHS Block Grant Coordinator
Indiana State Department of Health

2 N. Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Phone: 317-234-2865
Web: www.in.gov/isdh

**For more information on the
PHHS Block Grant, go to**
www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant

**For more information on
Healthy People, go to** www.healthypeople.gov

[PHHS Block Grant Supports](#)
[Indiana Healthy People Priorities](#)

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with health objectives from [Healthy People](#).

Indiana uses its funds to address 14 health objective priorities, including

- Cardiovascular Health.
- Community Water Fluoridation.
- Accredited Public Health Agencies.
- Public Health Agency Quality Improvement Program.
- Health Improvement Plans.

For a complete list of funded health objectives, go to
<http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/stateHPprior.htm>.